

Public Hearing Testimony 12/1/2008 Alderman Mark Bettencourt

Good evening, I am Alderman Mark Bettencourt from the Council of the City of Norwich. First I'd like to welcome the committee members to Norwich and thank the committee members for holding this hearing. Second, I'd like to thank your OPM staff, particularly Tyler Kleykamp, who was very helpful in quickly sending me the information I needed and answering questions regarding this process. That allowed me to choose what I believe is the correct course of action and author the resolution, passed unanimously by the City Council, that brings us all here this evening.

If you would allow me to give a very quick chronology of events, as I saw them, that brought us to this point. The mayor and the city manager received notification of the developer's application to change the property in question to neighborhood conservation from rural lands. The city, through its planning director in consultation with the mayor, waived it right to public hearing. Part of the rationale for this was to promote public utility expansion. The council was initially informed of the application and given a copy of OPM's recommendation but never considered the waiver as a body. Personally, after I read what I thought was a well reasoned, negative recommendation from OPM, I was surprised the committee took the action it did. After the July meeting where the application was approved, concerned residents began contacting council members which ultimately lead us to make the application to change those properties back to rural lands, bringing us here today.

Regarding the application itself, although I wasn't present at the July meeting I was able to view the recorded proceedings. There were some things that concerned me regarding the applicant's presentation. One there was a significant amount of discussion regarding the proximity of another proposed development, the Byron Brook Country Club. It seemed that the

approvals surrounding the Byron Brook project might have been thought of as justification for the approval of the developer's application. No part of that project has yet to put a shovel in the ground and the golf course portion of the project, a few holes of which are the only part of that project close to this one, is unlikely to be built in the near future if at all. The two projects differ greatly in that the Byron Brook project, if built, has sewers that are gravity fed. This would allow others to use sewer lines that run to the project and expand public water and sewer to sections that didn't have it before. As you know there is a great public benefit to that kind of development. Conversely, the proposed project addressed here uses a private force main that has, in my opinion no public benefit, except to that of the project at hand. Additionally the sewer pipe will run through an under significant wetlands of which I'll show some photographs. They are currently in the wetlands permitting process and I question whether they'll be able to acquire those permits. The private force main will run for a mile under public, city streets and over a section of I-395. Personally I object to this significant use of public lands for a private endeavor.

This section of town can only be classified as rural lands. I know you all look at maps but I've brought some pictures today of the areas at issue. I think they give you a better feel for the area in question. You'll note winding, narrow roads with no shoulders. These are not the types of roads that I would want to add significant additional traffic. Also some of the area is still actively used for growing corn and hay. Also the sewer pipe would have to run under Byron Brook, and I have pictures of that area also. In addition to wetlands and road issues the project is also close to our backup reservoir and I'm concerned about what construction might due to that watershed.

This is not an area primed for the dense development that could be permitted under the neighborhood conservation designation and our Active Adult Community ordinance. It should

have never been allowed to change to that designation. The city did fail to address the issue with the committee earlier causing the committee to act in a manner that I understand they thought appropriate at that time. For that I apologize but we can fix that now. I'd ask that the committee approve the city's application and change the designation of these lands back to rural lands as they were before.

Alderman Mark Bettencourt